

Pay for Print: Implementing Fee for Service Programs

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Introduction

Along with the increasing use of computers in libraries has come an equal increase in the consumption of paper. This has been especially true at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) over the past several years. The use of the Web is gaining in popularity and so is the proliferation of full-text electronic databases to the Library's collections. User demand for printing electronic information has rapidly increased, along with the costs and use of paper, toner cartridges, and printer maintenance and repairs. It has become easier to click on the print button than to put pencil to paper, which cost a great deal to support and encourages thoughtless consumption of resources. In this paper, we will address VCU's strategy for gaining control over the high cost and waste associated with these rising printing demands.

History/Background Information

The James Branch Cabell Library (JBC) and the Tompkins-McCaw Library (TML) are located on the campuses of Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

James Branch Cabell Library is located on the Academic Campus in the historic Fan District and Tompkins-McCaw Library is located on the Medical College of Virginia Campus (MCV) two miles east near downtown Richmond. The Libraries support learning, teaching, research, health care and public service at VCU through the wealth of information resources they provide.

TML's end-user population consists mainly of graduate and professional students but also includes VCU faculty, staff, and undergraduates. JBC's end-user population is made up of mostly undergraduate students, although a large number of graduate, faculty and staff are served. Both libraries support a large number of community borrowers who include high school students, patrons from consortium institutions, other institutional program agreements, and registered community borrowers. As a state institution, the libraries are public facilities and the surrounding community has access to public computers, printers, copiers, and most collections.

Prior to July 1996, TML had 12 mainframe dumb terminals operating as the core access to databases and health science information. Each terminal had a dot-

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matrix printer. A 15 computer workstation teaching facility (LIMERC) provided access to local area network resources as well as some windows based software including Internet access. Two networked dot-matrix printers were shared between the 15 workstations. The LIMERC was available for student use when no classes were being taught. In July 1996, TML replaced the 12 mainframe dumb terminals with 16 networked Internet capable computers and upgraded the computers in the LIMERC. No additional dot-matrix printers were added in the new networked environment nor were any shared with the new extra computers in the public areas. Those computers had no printing available.

The core of the computers used to access databases in JBC were located on the first floor near the Reference Services Desk. There was a total of 25 computers, 16 of which had dot-matrix printers attached. Every two computers shared a printer leaving nine computers without printers. Like TML, patrons were permitted to use the 16 additional computers located in the Library Instruction Classroom Lab (LICL) but no printing was available. A few additional computers and mainframe dumb terminals, without attached printers, were located throughout the building on the second, third and fourth floors.

Printing was problematic on both campuses and patrons and staff became increasingly frustrated with the process. The capabilities of the new computers were challenging the abilities of the dot matrix printers. Windows applications were graphically intense and web pages with graphics and formatted fonts nearly brought the printers to a stand still. Library users further contributed to the problem by spending hours at a computer printing citations and web pages that often ended up in the recycling bins. The libraries were going through reams of paper and dozens of printer cartridges on a weekly basis. Staff were put in the awkward position of asking patrons to limit printing and were constantly clearing paper jams and providing troubleshooting support. Additionally, the noise created by the dot matrix printers made the area unattractive for patrons who needed a quiet place to study.

Request For Proposal (RFP)

It became clear that the libraries needed to take immediate steps to address these printing problems. Laser printers were an alternative that would provide the robust printing needed in an academic environment, but they

were beyond the limits of the libraries' small overhead budgets. After investigating a number of alternatives, a decision was made that the cost of printing would have to be passed on to the end user.

In the fall of 1996, a committee was formed to write a Pay for Print RFP with the goal to:

establish a contract with a firm that is able to support the University in implementing a cost recovery system for computer printers that is fully integrated with existing systems, meets the diverse printing needs of its clientele on both campuses, and can be administered efficiently.

Five objectives were listed in support of this goal:

- recover at least partial printing costs;
- improve management of public printers services;
- significantly reduce wasted printing;
- increase network efficiency;
- utilize card access technology.

The RFP detailed a two-tiered service level to be provided by the vendor. Tier one was described as a complete turnkey system that required the vendor to supply all software, equipment, supplies and staffing. Tier two enabled those computing facilities with substantial investments in printing technology to maintain control of that service and equipment but provided a method for cost recovery. Since the libraries could not afford to invest in laser technology, we selected IKON Office Solutions' complete turnkey system which met our goals and objectives, was compatible with our existing vending card system, and minimized use of staff time.

Implementation

A Pay for Print taskforce was formed and services were scheduled to be implemented at both libraries during the summer session when fewer students were on campus. This would allow two months before the start of the fall semester to plan for the transition from a free printing service to a fee-based service. Planned activities included staff training, development and distribution of public relations materials, web page creation, and meetings with the various units on campus. These units included the Student Government Association (SGA) and faculty and deans from the individual schools. However, negotiations with the vendor to finalize the contract delayed the implementation date. This delay left us with

only two weeks before the beginning of the semester to complete our planned activities.

In August 1997, we installed one Pay for Print workstation at TML and four at JBC. Signs outlining instructions, locations, and costs were developed and posted at each computer workstation and at the printer locations. Web pages addressing questions and pointing out the advantages of pay for print were developed and staff was given training.

The service was free to users during the first two weeks of the semester. Initially charges were \$.12 for single sided black and white copy, \$.55 for single sided color, and \$.15 for black and white two sided. The single sided black and white copy was later reduced to \$.09 per page.

User Impact

Whenever you implement a fee-based service you must anticipate some initial negative reactions. However, we underestimated the impact that pay for print would have on our users. We were not fully prepared for the initial outpouring of concern and dissatisfaction over the decision to implement a fee-based printing service. The delay in implementation of pay for print took away the time we needed to sufficiently train staff and market the benefits of the new service. Some students were outraged and expressed their anger and frustration through the student newspaper as well as to staff and administration directly. They felt that the decision was made without their input and the fee of \$.12 a copy was financially prohibitive. University and Library officials met with students to discuss their issues with regard to the service.

In order to respond to the concerns of the library community, we looked at a number of alternatives, including:

- Open Forums sponsored by the Academic Campus Student Government Association (AC-SGA);
- A listserv was created to provide an outlet for users to ask questions and vent their frustrations and receive a response from administration;
- Articles to provide information on the service;
- A pay for print program survey, "Tell us what you think" to garner their input.

In an effort to address student concerns firsthand, the vice provost for the Office for Information Technology attended SGA forums. The feedback he received generally indicated that, while many students understood

why the libraries were implementing the new service, they were not pleased with their lack of input into the decision making process, the cost per page, the minimal publicity, and timing of the service fee. As a direct response to the concerns expressed in these forums, the decision was made to reduce the price of printing from \$.12 to \$.09 a page.

While users on the Medical Campus expressed some disapproval over the new fee, the majority of the feedback had come from students on the Academic Campus. To help determine the attitudes of our students on the Medical Campus, we conducted a survey seeking feedback to determine user satisfaction at TML. The survey consisted of 21 questions and was completed by 81 patrons.

Over a year after the service was implemented, the same user survey conducted at TML was conducted at JBC. The survey was completed by 124 users and collected by staff at the major public services desks. The responses to the JBC survey were similar to the responses at TML. Although respondents at both libraries indicated that they were printing less (51% at JBC and 75% at TML) the noticeable differences (24%) between the two libraries may be attributed to users now being accustomed to pay for print services. No community borrowers responded to the survey, but staff noticed a significant reduction in printing by these users. Respondents from both libraries were more selective in what they printed (54% at JBC and 62% at TML). Over half of the respondents at JBC (52%) indicated no change in their use of pencil and paper. A year earlier, the TML respondents (62%) indicated that they were using pencil and paper more. The differences between the libraries may be an indication that users are accepting and adjusting to the fee more than when first implemented.

The majority of the respondents at both campuses agreed that the print jobs were of good quality (75% at JBC and 94% at TML). Most respondents reported that the cost was too high (71% at JBC and 65% at TML). About one third of the respondents reported that the services should be free (33% at JBC and 27% at TML) while the majority reported that \$.05 (58% at JBC and 57% at TML) per page was reasonable. The most respondents were willing to pay was \$.10 per page (51% at JBC and 34% at TML).

The majority (81% at JBC and 68% at TML) of the respondents would like to print on both sides of a sheet. The majority (74%) of the respondents at JBC would

like to be able to print in color while less than one half (46%) would like to print in color at TML.

The majority (67% at JBC and 75% at TML) of respondents have not downloaded to a floppy diskette. The respondents who had downloaded to a diskette did so seldomly. Sixty-four percent of the JBC respondents were aware that they could e-mail search results. Less than half (44%) of the TML respondents were aware of this. The increased awareness at JBC may be the result of continued patron education about the service and its associated fee.

The respondents (66% at JBC and 77% at TML) agreed that the quality of the print copy is better than the dot matrix printer and agreed (75% at JBC and 72% at TML) that the pay for print system was easy to use.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Communication is key to the success of implementing any major change in service and especially a change from free to fee. Clearly communicate the whys and goals of the new service, and develop a marketing campaign which focuses on its benefits. Promote the service to the primary users through press releases, brochures, articles in the campus paper, displays, and web pages. Attend Student Government Association (SGA) meetings and solicit support from colleagues campus wide. Include a member of the SGA on the Implementation Task Force to help distribute the information. Help the users get used to the change well in advance of implementation.

Educate and train staff to deal with users who are not familiar with or oppose the fee-based service. Ensure that staff clearly understand the goals of the organiza-

tion and the whys of implementing a fee-based service so that they can communicate this effectively to users. Sufficiently train staff to use the system before patron questions arise.

The pay for print system itself has been easy to use and we have experienced few system errors or equipment failures. Before implementing the new service, make sure that an adequate maintenance agreement with the vendor is in place. Request that the vendor provide courtesy cards, a procedure for refunds, and a customer service representative on a routine basis. Communicate troubleshooting problems and solutions to all staff who are responsible for providing any patron assistance. It will be easier for users to accept the new fee based service if it works properly. Keep the fee in line with other similar services such as photocopying and if possible, provide the service at no charge until all bugs have been worked out of the system.

Summary

The first two months after implementing pay for print proved challenging for the library users and staff. Users were very vocal about their unhappiness over the fee and staff had to deal with frustrated patrons while maintaining quality customer service. However, the benefits of changing to a fee-based printing system have far outweighed the initial negative reactions from our users. We have seen a dramatic decrease in the amount of wasted paper and in the costs of our printing supplies. Now, a year and a half later, we are faced with few complaints over the fee and pay for print is a comfortable part of the libraries' routine.